The Search for Suitable Strategy:
Threat-Based and Capabilities-Based Strategies in a Complex World

A Monograph

by

Maj John Christianson
United States Air Force

School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2016

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED (From - To)
09-03-2016	SAMS Monograph	JUN 2015 - MAY 2016

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

The Search for Suitable Strategy: Threat-Based and Capabilities-Based Strategies in a Complex World

5a. CONTRACT NUMBER

5b. GRANT NUMBER

5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)

Maj John A. Christianson

5d. PROJECT NUMBER

5e. TASK NUMBER

5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

US Army Command and General Staff College
ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

School of Advanced Military Studies

10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)

11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
Since the end of the Cold War, capabilities-based military strategies have become increasingly common. The complex nature of the international environment has driven many militaries to focus on a set of capabilities to deal with a multitude of ill-defined threats rather than using a traditional threat-based military strategy. This leads to the inevitable question: Which form of strategy is better? While theory suggests that threat-based strategies are the more complete model, both can be ill-suited to the problem at hand if based on incorrect assumptions. Historical case studies of the Franco-Prussian War, the United States in the interwar years, and Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War show that the true path to suitable strategy is a measure of forethought and theoretical planning exercises to shape habits of thought and identify risks or shortcomings inherent in a chosen strategy, whether threat-based or capabilities-based.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Strategy, Military Strategy, Strategic Planning, Complex World, Defense Planning, 1870 Franco-Prussian War, United States in World War II, 1973 Arab-Israeli War

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			Maj John A. Christianson
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	59	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (913) 364-4891

Reset

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: Maj John Christianson

Monograph Title: The Search for Suitable Strategy: Threat-Based and Capabilities-
Based Strategies in a Complex World

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Gerald S. Gorman, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
Paul G. Schlimm, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL, IN

Accepted this 26th day of May 2016 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

Abstract

The Search for Suitable Strategy: Threat-Based and Capabilities-Based Strategies in a Complex World, by Maj John Christianson, 59 Pages.

Since the end of the Cold War, capabilities-based military strategies have become increasingly common. The complex nature of the international environment has driven many militaries to focus on a set of capabilities to deal with a multitude of ill-defined threats rather than using a traditional threat-based military strategy. This leads to the inevitable question: Which form of strategy is better? While theory suggests that threat-based strategies are the more complete model, both can be ill-suited to the problem at hand if based on incorrect assumptions. Historical case studies of the Franco-Prussian War, the United States in the interwar years, and Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War show that the true path to suitable strategy is a measure of forethought and theoretical planning exercises to shape habits of thought and identify risks or shortcomings inherent in a chosen strategy, whether threat-based or capabilities-based.

Contents

iv

Acknowledgments

Acronyms

A2/AD   Anti-Access Area Denial

AAA   Anti-Aircraft Artillery

IDF   Israeli Defense Force

SAM   Surface to Air Missile

QDR   Quadrennial Defense Review

Introduction: Knowing What to do With Your Hands

There is a scene in the 2006 comedy movie "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby" in which the title character is faced with his first television interview following his unexpected substitution into an automobile race as a driver. Uncertain what to do in the unplanned and uncertain situation, the protagonist stumbles through the process, desperately declaring, "I don't know what to do with my hands!" Developing a coherent military strategy in a complex environment can leave planners in a similar situation as Mr. Bobby, overwhelmed and grasping for something to say or do. Understanding how various models of strategy fit into such an environment is critical if planners are to develop a strategy that is something more than, in the words of Mr. Bobby, be "a big, hairy, American winning machine!" This monograph aims to dispel some of that potential confusion by analyzing the two most common types of military strategies, threat-based and capabilities-based, and then drawing some conclusions for how to apply these types of strategies in a complex world.

Threat-based military strategies historically have been the more prevalent, but the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War led to a shift in Western military thought, particularly in the United States. The threat-based strategy developed during the Cold War to deal with the Soviet Union reached its apex during Operation Desert Storm in Iraq in 1991. What the United States used so effectively against Iraqi forces in that conflict was not a strategy devised to fight in the desert against an army with older equipment such as the Iraqis, but instead had a singular focus on fighting the forces of the Soviet Union in central Europe. This strategy, expressed best in the AirLand Battle concept, called for using land and air forces in concert to leverage the technological advantages of the United States against the mass of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. This was a strategy developed with a certain threat in mind and then adapted to a different threat as it occurred. As the United States celebrated its dominance on the

1

battlefield over a lesser foe, however, the international situation continued to change rapidly. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the turn of former Warsaw Pact countries to Western style democracies left military planners with an important question: for which threat do we plan?

No longer faced with a monolithic threat, Western military thinkers, in particular those of the United States, stretched to find a new direction for their forces. A possible answer arose in capabilities-based strategic planning. Leaning on the technological overmatch that had contributed to victory in Iraq as evidence, strategists postulated that a military strategy built around a set of capabilities could be applied against any threat that might arise from an uncertain environment. This idea reached its full expression in the US 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). The document stated that it is impossible to know which nation, nations, or other groups will threaten the United States, so the nation must develop capabilities to fight a full range of asymmetric threats and Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) adversaries.[1] The QDR shifted the focus of US military strategy from a traditional threat-based model to one "focused more on how an adversary might fight than who the adversary might be and where a war might occur."[2] After fourteen years of fighting a global extremist threat, the idea of a capabilities-based military strategy is stronger than ever. The most recent QDR maintains a focus on capabilities-based strategy in its push to rebalance the force to face a "diverse range of challenges" with a "full spectrum of possible operations."[3] In other words, it reaffirms the view that the United States does not know which adversary it will face - it needs to develop capabilities to be ready for

---

[1] *Quadrennial Defense Review Report: September 30, 2001* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), 13-14.

[2] Ibid., 14.

[3] *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), VII.

anything. In recent decades, the view of the world as more complex than ever is increasingly popular and has strengthened the preference for a capabilities-based strategy.

On the surface, a capabilities-based military strategy seems to be an ideal solution for a complex world. While traditional threat-based strategies work well if used against their intended threat, they must be adapted in the face of a new or different threat. On the other hand, capabilities-based strategies offer the promise of adaptability to any threat that may arise. On closer inspection, however, capabilities-based strategies are just as likely to endure a period of adaption at the onset of a war. If the war fought is not suited to the capabilities acquired, the strategy can be just as mismatched to the war as a strategy planned for a different threat. Faced with this notion, military planners must decide which type of strategy, threat-based or capabilities-based, is best for their given situation.

It is the hypothesis of this monograph that nations can employ either a threat-based or a capabilities-based strategy effectively in a complex environment, depending on the situation at the time. Additionally, pitfalls exist for both types of strategy, but are more acute in capabilities-based strategies. To test this hypothesis, the first section of this monograph looks at why Western militaries choose a certain type of strategy with a specific eye to the implications of complexity theory. Then the work of Everett Dolman and Richard Rumelt serves as a guide to discuss the distinction between grand strategy and military strategy and to develop a theoretical framework to use when analyzing various case studies. Specifically, the monograph judges three case studies against a set of criteria for "good" strategy and whether those strategies were able to adapt to unforeseen events to accomplish their goals. Subsequent sections analyze the three case studies to test the hypothesis against the developed framework. The first case study examines the Franco-Prussian War as an example of the threat-based strategy employed against a known threat. The next case study looks at developing a threat-based military strategy in an uncertain environment

using the lens of the United States prior to World War II. The last case study uses the 1973 Arab-Israeli War as an example of a capabilities-based strategy in action during conflict. Finally, a discussion of the implications from the three case studies leads to a few general recommendations of applicability to the modern context.

Why Do Militaries Choose Capabilities-Based Strategies?

It is important to understand why a military would choose a threat-based or a capabilities-based strategy. The reasons for choosing a threat-based strategy are somewhat obvious. If there is a known or perceived threat that is easily identifiable, then building a strategy to counter it makes sense. This strategy then provides a rationale for a needed force structure and the training to go with it.[4] When only one or two credible threats exist, the decision to build a strategy around a threat is a relatively easy one for strategic planners to make. When faced with a multitude of ill-defined threats or threatening capabilities such as terrorism, however, the decision becomes more difficult. In such a complex international system, some have chosen the route of a capabilities-based threat.

Complexity in the international system is not new, but it has become fashionable in the last few decades to discuss it in relation to a wide range of subjects to include international relations and strategy. Interestingly, the rise of complexity in theory has almost paralleled the swing to capabilities-based strategies. Much like the shift in strategic focus caused by the end of the Cold War, one can link the rise of complexity in the international relations to the shift to a multipolar system after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[5] While complexity in systems has always existed, complexity as a theory has shaped the practical application of strategy. Therefore,

---

[4] Isaiah Wilson, "Strategy, Revisited: Analyzing the Shift from a Threat-Based to Capabilities-Based Approach to Us Strategic Planning" (United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 2002), 5, accessed November 19, 2015, http://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/6294/uploads.

[5] Antoine Bousquet and Simon Curtis, "Beyond Models and Metaphors: Complexity Theory, Systems Thinking and International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24, no. 1 (March 2011): 43-62.

a brief overview of the theory is helpful to an understanding of the recent Western preference for capabilities-based strategies.

Traditionally, the study of international politics often described the interactions between states within the international system, but the system itself was not subject to analysis.[6] This approach inherent in the traditional theories of international relations neglects the fact that the system itself is complex. We cannot directly compare two situations in order to test a variable because the system has multiple inter-connections to other variables.[7] If an actor acts upon something in a complex system, there can be multiple results that were unforeseen at the outset. The expression of the ideas of complexity in theory led to a corresponding boom in research and writing on how to account for this complexity in a wide range of subjects, including international relations and strategy.

Followers of complexity realize the variable nature of a system and reject the idea that a complex system can be analyzed and understood through an analysis of its individual parts.[8] In other words, we cannot view anything in a complex system in a vacuum and must take all constituent parts into account in an analysis of that system. According to Robert Jervis, for the field of international relations, "What this means is that actors both shape and are shaped by the system. Each must choose a strategy with an eye to the strategies it expects others to follow. Furthermore, its behavior must be guided by beliefs about the system dynamics that will unfold."[9]

---

[6] Robert Jervis, "Thinking Systemically About Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 15 (2010): 165-71.

[7] Ibid., 166.

[8] Bosquet and Curtis, "Beyond Models and Metaphors," 45.

[9] Jervis, "Thinking Systemically," 170.

In international relations then, analysts must view any action not only through the lens of what effect it will produce on an adversary but also how it will affect the original actor, other third party actors, what actions the adversary will take, and how each actor's worldview will influence their perception of what is going on. The sheer number of variables in a complex system can become mind-boggling to a strategist or decision maker very quickly. It is this aspect of complexity that can lead to a capabilities-based strategy.

This does not mean of course that the rise of complexity theory is the sole cause for a choosing capabilities-based strategy. The international system has always been complex, whether theorists had written the idea down or not. Rather, complexity theory offers us a lens to see the system in a way similar to how a strategist choosing capabilities-based strategy might. Additionally, the rise of complexity theory just prior to the end of the Cold War surely has influenced how thinkers, including military strategists, see the world. Faced then with the idea of the international system as complex, strategists often choose not to identify a potential adversary. If the world is complex and full of threats, they argue, then a capabilities-based strategy should be used in order to be prepared for anything. Recent examples of this are evident in both the US Army Operating Concept and Australia's national defense policy.

The US Army Operating Concept, titled "Win in a Complex World," states that the Army will operate in an "environment that is not only unknown, but unknowable and constantly changing. The Army cannot predict who it will fight, where it will fight, and with what coalition it will fight."[10] It further goes on to identify the capabilities the Army must have to "win" in this complex environment.[11] One problem inherent in this document is that it never defines "win"

---

[10] Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), iii.

beyond a brief statement saying that winning happens at the strategic level.[12] Without a

prescribed definition of "win" one must rely on the traditional definition which is to "be

successful or victorious in a contest or conflict."[13] Both a contest or a conflict by nature imply an

adversary, but a capabilities-based strategy such as "Win in a Complex World" does not provide

one. The document authors acknowledge this stating, "this operating concept does not deliver a

definitive answer to the problem of future armed conflict. Rather it describes how the Army may

provide foundational capabilities to the Joint Force and civil authorities to enable joint

operations."[14]

   Likewise, the Australian national defense policy outlined in *Defence White Paper 2013* is

a strategy firmly entrenched in capabilities-based thought, outlining the strategic context of

Australian defense as an environment that is complex and interconnected.[15] *The Defence White*

Paper goes on to describe the priority strategic aim of Australia as to defend "against direct

armed attack, including attacks by hostile states and by non-state adversaries."[16] While the

strategy lists several potential areas of interest, it never identifies a most likely adversary or

threat, instead focusing on the need to maintain "credible high-end capabilities" in order to "deter

would-be adversaries."[17] Much like the Army Operating Concept, this strategy also eschews

---

[11] TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 7.

[12] Ibid., iii.

[13] Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "Win," accessed December 2, 2015,
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/win.

[14] TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 24.

[15] Defence White Paper 2013 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013), 55.

[16] Ibid., 24.

[17] Ibid., 23.

identifying a most likely adversary due to the complexity of the international environment, instead focusing on capabilities needed to respond to a wide range of potential threats.

These are only two recent examples of many, but they illustrate the tendency of the ideas of complexity to lead to indecision. This is not to say that complexity theory itself leads to indecision, but that the uncertainty inherent in a complex world does. Complexity, while regularly called a theory, is in fact not a complete theory but a set of ideas about how systems interact. Antione Bosquet and Simon Curtis argue it is a "conceptual toolkit," a set of ideas that can be used to better understand the international system.[18] In other words, the fact that the international system is complex should not be the end point in a strategist's thinking. Knowing the system is complex is important because it gives one a better understanding of how the system works, but it does not preclude attempting to identify the problem or adversary faced. According to Jervis, "Systems then do not make meaningful action impossible. But the dynamics they display not only make them difficult to understand, but mean that even the most carefully crafted strategy may have multiple consequences that can move the actors – and the rest of the world – to unexpected destinations."[19] Because the international system is complex, identified adversaries may be incorrect and actions may have unintended results, but strategists can still take action and can still identify most likely adversaries.

Military strategy has its roots in the desire to control the battlefield, but as Lawrence Freedman notes in his thoughts on the idea of a master strategist, "Pure control was always an illusion, at most a temporary sensation of success which would soon pass as the new situation

---

[18] Bosquet and Curtis, "Beyond Models and Metaphors," 45.

[19] Jervis, "Thinking Systemically," 171.

generated its own challenges."[20] The Western realization of international complexity and the

resultant internalization of the ideas of complexity, has led Western strategists to favor

capabilities-based strategies in order to retain a modicum of control over the battlefield. These

strategists are making the decision to make no decision about a most likely adversary or threat,

instead making the decision to prepare for the uncertainty of the future in different ways. This

certainly allows a measure of flexibility for new situations as they arise, but in the end all

decision makers still rely on their own perceptions and worldview to decide on a course of

action.[21] Waiting to react to an adversary's action risks putting the strategist in a disadvantageous

position in regards to that adversary.

The previous argument does not necessarily mean a capabilities-based strategy is a poor

strategy. As discussed above, choosing the incorrect threat can just as easily catch a military

using a threat-based strategy off guard as can a capabilities-based strategy by choosing the wrong

capabilities or no threat. Whether there are problems inherent in a given approach or not, we must

analyze both threat-based and capabilities-based approaches before drawing any concrete

conclusions about which is a better strategy for a complex international system.

---

[20] Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 242-43.

[21] Stephen Walt, "One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy* 110 (Spring 1998): 29-46.

What Is Good Military Strategy?

In order to begin a discussion of what a good strategy is, we must first bound our discussion and define "strategy," which is somewhat of a loaded word. The word is based in military thought and has its origins in the Greek word "*strategia*" meaning "generalship."[22] A brief internet search of the word strategy, however, returns a diverse range of articles on everything from more common uses in business, military, and international politics to esoteric ideas of sports, board games, and how to get out of "the friend zone."[23] This wide range of uses shows that the gap between strategy's root meaning and how it is used is immense. If the word strategy is simply reduced to a catch phrase or an all-inclusive idea to mean a synonym for success then it becomes nearly useless.[24] A word that can mean anything means nothing at all, so we must necessarily narrow our view of the term to enable discussion.

As this discussion concerns strategic preparation prior to war as well as conduct in war, we can limit ourselves to the two types of strategy expressed by Everett Dolman that would involve extensive planning or thought before the start of hostilities: grand strategy and military strategy. Grand strategy determines a nation's direction as a whole and provides political direction to the military instrument of power, while military strategy links military means to those

---

[22] Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "Strategy," accessed November 10, 2015, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/strategy.

[23] A situation in which two people have a friendship but one of them harbors unrequited romantic feelings. Jeremy Nicholson, "Escape the Friend Zone," *Psychology Today*, accessed November 10, 2015, https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-attraction-doctor/201112/escape-the-friend-zone-friend-girlfriend-or-boyfriend.

[24] Richard P. Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters* (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 5.

political ends on a broad scale.[25] These two levels are similar to the two advanced by B.H.

Liddell Hart in his discussions of strategy and grand strategy. To Liddell Hart, grand strategy is

almost identical to Dolman's idea of the term in that it determines the greater policy objectives of

a nation and directs all the resources of that nation, of which the military is but one, to meet those

objectives.[26] Strategy, on the other hand, is the distribution and employment of military means to

meet the greater political end. It focuses on effects more so than actual tactical or operational

movement.[27] In order to generate the effects a military wants against a given adversary or

situation, the military must train and equip forces capable of generating those effects and develop

a plan for their employment developed. Strategy then necessitates some measure of forethought

before a conflict begins.

When we further consider that grand strategy or strategic direction from political leaders

is more akin to what Clausewitz describes a policy and has historically been vague or non-

existent in Western democracies, then we can further limit our discussion to simply the military

application of strategy.[28] Military strategy is of primary concern to this discussion because it is

the one form of strategy that is regularly subject to extensive thought and planning before any war

or conflict occurs. For the remainder of this monograph then, strategy or military strategy will

refer to the process of training, equipping and planning for the employment of military forces to

create an effect in order to meet a political objective. This political objective can be either a real

---

[25] Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 30.

[26] Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Meridian, 1991), 322.

[27] Ibid., 321.

[28] Matthew Gaetke, "Certainty Is Illusion: The Myth of Strategic Guidance" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2015), 46.

one derived from clear strategic guidance or a perceived one derived from interpreted guidance or best estimates of the military staff.

With this in mind, we must now determine how to judge the effectiveness of a strategy, whether it is good or bad. The terms 'effective,' 'good,' and 'bad' are clearly subjective and in fact run counter to Dolman's idea that strategies should be judged against each other rather than as simply good or bad.[29] Even when judging strategies against each other, however, we must apply some potentially subjective terms for descriptive purposes. In order to avoid the trap of which Dolman warns, a clear objective framework is required to judge strategies against. The work of Richard Rumelt is useful in this regard. While Rumelt initially developed his ideas with business strategy in mind, they are just as applicable to military strategy and in line with other theorists in that arena.

Rumelt shares the frustration with the overuse of the term strategy. Rather than discuss the various meanings or levels of strategy as Dolman and Liddell Hart do, Rumelt instead focuses on the lack of coherent plans in many incarnations of strategy regardless of the type. Strategy, he argues, must always include a set of coherent actions. Viewing strategy as a broad idea without any specific actions leaves no direction for implementation and is not a strategy at all.[30] A good strategy is not simply a vision, exhortation, or an end state; a good strategy "honestly acknowledges the challenges being faced and provides an approach for overcoming them."[31] To

---

[29] Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 12.

[30] Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*, 6.

[31] Ibid., 4.

achieve this, a good strategy always has a "kernel" consisting of three parts: a diagnosis, a guiding policy, and coherent action.[32]

A diagnosis defines the nature of the problem faced and identifies certain aspects as more important than others or critical to the issue at hand.[33] This is the crucial first step to forming strategy. If strategists do not understand and acknowledge the diagnosis, then there is no basis or impetus for any further strategic development. Rumelt argues that at a very minimum, the diagnosis must describe the situation, link known facts into patterns, and point out which issues are more critical than others.[34] Taking this idea into the realm of military strategy, Dolman argues that strategy is intricately linked to the perceived enemy.[35] This is also in line with Carl von Clausewitz's discussions on strategy. Clausewitz argues that strategists must consider the political goals of both sides of a conflict when developing a strategy, otherwise anything developed is not really a strategy but an arbitrary goal.[36] In other words, without an opponent to plan against, a strategy is not really a strategy but simply a compilation of arbitrary ideas.

This is not to say that a strategy cannot be effective without an identified enemy. It is important to note that a specific enemy may not be readily apparent in a complex international system. While Clausewitz and Dolman argue for the necessity to plan for an enemy, Rumelt's argument for identifying the most critical aspects of the problem faced does not necessarily call

---

[32] Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*, 7.

[33] Ibid., 77.

[34] Ibid., 79.

[35] Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 21.

[36] Carl von Clausewitz, ed., trans., *Carl von Clausewitz: Two Letters On Strategy*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Daniel Moran (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), 25-26.

for an identified enemy but instead an identified issue. In other words, a strategist could develop a strategy to deal with global extremism or a potential natural disaster. These both identify something to plan against but do not identify a specific enemy. Dolman himself also argues that no strategy will ever be perfect due to the complexity of the world.[37] This is the difference between the perfect world of theory and the real world of the practitioner. Therefore, while theorists of military strategy prefer an identified enemy, it is possible that a diagnosis of the system does not allow for an identified enemy. An example of this would be political concerns limiting what the military strategist can do in order to not provoke a potential adversary. What is important is that strategists identify a problem or issue, whether it is a specified enemy or not.

The second aspect of Rumelt's kernel of strategy is the guiding policy, which is the overarching approach for dealing with the problem outlined in the diagnosis. The guiding policy "channels action in certain directions without dealing with exactly what shall be done."[38] This idea too is in line with theorists on military strategy. Dolman asserts that strategy does not prescribe specific actions, but instead serves as a plan that will set in motion further action or events that will lead to a desired outcome.[39] A good strategy will contain a guiding policy that outlines the vision or goals of the strategy without directing specific tactical actions. All too often, many mistake this guiding policy for the strategy itself, but strategy must also contain some form of coherent action.[40] A guiding policy without some form of action attached to it is nothing

---

[37] Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 22.

[38] Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*, 84-85.

[39] Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 11.

[40] Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*, 87.

more than a half formed idea and no more useful than a strategy that does not address a specific problem.

At first this idea of coherent action, Rumelt's third and final aspect of the kernel of strategy, can seem confusing when we consider the previous assertion that strategies must not require specific tactical actions. When viewed through the lens of preparation, however, the idea becomes clear. While specific tactical actions are outside the realm of strategy, the actions of preparation are fully a part of strategy and are required for strategic development. In other words, battlefield commanders retain responsibility for tactical actions but a good strategy will guide the preparation that sets those commanders up for success. This includes training, equipping, and developing basic plans for action in order ensure forces are prepared for conflict.

Furthermore, the idea of coherent action includes proximate objectives, goals that are attainable and feasible, and can be used to encourage and move your forces forward to the ultimate goal. Rumelt refers to these as "gateway goals."[41] These proximate objectives become even more important to developing good strategy when one considers Dolman's view that strategy is an unending process in order to seek out a continuous relative advantage over an adversary.[42] If strategy does not truly have an end state, the strategist must provide something for the military to aim for during operations. Therefore, coherent action, to include proximate objectives, is an important part of developing a good strategy.

These three elements - a diagnosis, a guiding principle, and coherent action - can be used as a gauge to judge any military strategy, but there is one more important aspect missing for a complete picture of a strategy's effectiveness. We must judge any strategy by its use in

---

[41] Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy*, 106.

[42] Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 4-6.

application. This applies to two areas. First and most importantly, was the strategy successful at accomplishing its goal? In other words, was it suitable to the issue at hand? Since we have already established that strategy is a continuous process, it stands to reason that this is not something that could be judged immediately after a conflict or even within the span of a few years. For this reason, this monograph analyzes only less recent historical case studies. Second, we must also judge strategies against their adaptability. There is no possible way to form a strategy for the correct enemy or situation every time, so we must determine whether a given strategy was successfully adapted to unforeseen enemies or circumstances during a conflict.

Henry Mintzberg, in his discussion on deliberate and emergent strategies, posits, "The real world inevitably involves some thinking ahead of time as well as some adaptation en route."[43] He further states that rarely can strategies be either purely deliberate or purely emergent as, "One suggests no learning, the other, no control. All real-world strategies need to mix these in some way to attempt to control without stopping the learning process."[44] In other words, viable strategies must be able to adapt to the particulars of the situation as they occur.

Combining Rumelt's elements of the kernel of strategy with our own gauges of suitability and adaptability, we have a list of five criteria. These criteria - a diagnosis, a guiding principle, coherent action, suitability, and adaptability - define the basis of a good strategy to evaluate all three case studies.

---

[43] Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 24.

[44] Ibid., 25.

Planning for the Expected: Prussian Strategy in the Franco-Prussian War

A famous line from the sketch comedy group Monty Python declares, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!" The same cannot be said of the Franco-Prussian War. Both France and Prussia widely expected the war, and to some extent even desired it. In France, Emperor Napoleon III faced waning support and saw a war as a way to regain favor amongst his people.[45] Prussia, under the political leadership of Otto von Bismarck, sought a unified German State and used both Austria and France as a foil to drive the other German States closer to Prussia.[46] Following the war between Austria and Prussia in 1866, Napoleon III recognized the danger a unified Germany posed to his aim of a "United States of Europe" and realized that war between the two powers was unavoidable.[47] Indeed, the two powers only did not go to war before 1870 because France needed more time to rearm itself and Bismarck did not yet fully trust the southern German States to join the north in a war against France.[48]

Three crises in 1870 finally sparked the conflict between France and Prussia. First was the bestowing of the title of "Kaiser" on the Prussian King Wilhelm in February 1870. The title and Wilhelm's speech during his acceptance both hinted at a "common German fatherland," a thinly veiled reference to German unification interpreted as a threat by France.[49] Second was a Prussian railway through Switzerland financed by Bismarck as a purposeful plot to antagonize

---

[45] Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20-21.

[46] Ibid., 21.

[47] Ibid., 17.

[48] Ibid., 22-24.

[49] Ibid., 32.

France.[50] Third was the Spanish crown affair in which Bismarck maneuvered to have Prussian Prince Leopold named as successor to the vacant Spanish crown. France saw this as an existential threat because Prussian controlled states would then surround France. Leopold eventually withdrew his name from consideration to lessen the crisis, but Bismarck was undeterred in his quest for war with France. He altered the wording of what became known as the Ems Telegram, making it seem Kaiser Wilhelm had been rude and dismissive regarding the Spanish crown affair towards the French emissary to Prussia.[51] This stoked furor in France for war with Prussia and France declared war on July 19, 1870.[52] Not only did Bismarck get a war with France, he enticed France to be the aggressor and drew Bavaria to side with Prussia in the war.

The Prussian Chief of Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, aimed to drive the Prussian 2nd and 3rd Armies into the French interior and bring them to bear in a "direct combined movement" against the Primary French Army. The first contact occurred on August 4 between the Prussian 3rd Army and the French I Corps, commanded by Marshal Patrice MacMahon at Wissembourg.[53] During this meeting engagement, the Prussian forces and their Bavarian allies experienced what Moltke would later term a "lively resistance before the walls" of Wissembourg.[54] Prussian superior artillery then pounded the town of Wissembourg, setting it alight and forcing the French forces

[50] Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

[51] Ibid., 54-55.

[52] Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 65.

[53] Ibid., 95.

[54] Helmuth Moltke, *The Franco-German War of 1870-71* (London: Greenhill Books, 1992), 12.

out of their concealment on the town walls, saving the encounter for Moltke's Army. The Prussians followed this up with flank attacks that forced the French into a hurried retreat.[55]

The battle of Wissembourg set a pattern that was remarkably consistent throughout the Franco-Prussian War. In numerous battles and engagements, Moltke's infantry units would initially engage the enemy, often taking heavy fire from the French. Prussian artillery would then engage the French forces causing great devastation. Prussian flanking or encirclement attacks would then complete the engagement. This pattern was evident in multiple engagements during the first phase of the War culminating in the Battle of Sedan on September 1, 1870.

At Sedan, Moltke's forces met with a France in disarray. The accumulation of French losses were beginning to stir revolutionary feelings in Paris.[56] In an attempt to gain control of the situation and revive patriotic feelings, Napoleon III had joined Marshal MacMahon's Army in the field to attempt a rescue of the Metz army. Thus, Napoleon III was with his army when they met the Prussians at Sedan. In the ensuing battle, the Prussians again used their artillery to great effect. By the end of the day Napoleon III, whom the Prussians had not realized was in Sedan, directed his forces to surrender.[57] The Prussians now had one French Army trapped at Metz, forced the surrender of another, and captured the French Emperor, all within six weeks of the declaration of war.

The stunning initial success of the Prussians left Bismarck with a conundrum. The capture of Napoleon III ignited the simmering revolutionary feelings in Paris and a new republic was declared on September 4. The new "Government of National Defense" refused to meet

---

[55] Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 100-101.

[56] Ibid., 140.

[57] Moltke, *The Franco-German War*, 98.

Prussian demands to cede Alsace-Lorraine or any other territory to Prussia in order to bring an end to the conflict.[58] Though the Prussians had brought Napoleon III's French government to heel at Sedan, they now dealt with a different, more obstinate one in Paris. As a result, Moltke ordered his army to march on Paris, beginning a siege of the city on September 20.[59]

A series of engagements around Paris occurred over the next several months as the Prussian forces stymied multiple French breakout attempts. When the French forces at Metz finally surrendered due to starvation on October 29, additional Prussian troops joined in the attempt to take Paris. Surprisingly, even this did little to change French resolve to hold Alsace-Lorraine.[60] The siege gradually worsened for both sides through the winter of 1870-1871 as Parisians faced food shortages and Prussian and Bavarian morale declined as the conflict dragged on in the face of French determination to hold their capital.[61] Bismarck eventually ordered Moltke to begin an artillery bombardment of the city of Paris itself rather than just the defenses. Moltke disagreed with the order because he believed it destroyed Prussian international credibility, but he eventually complied.[62] The resulting destruction and failures of several French last-ditch breakout attempts caused French troops to begin deserting en masse and the republican government signed an armistice with Prussia on January 26, 1871.[63] Prussia gained Alsace-Lorraine in the settlement

---

[58] Wawro, *the Franco-Prussian War*, 232-235.

[59] Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 230.

[60] Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 253.

[61] Ibid., 278.

[62] Ibid., 279.

[63] Ibid., 296-298.

and, as a result of the war, the remaining German states agreed to unification under Prussian leadership. In a mere six months, Prussia had accomplished all its war aims.

The Prussian victory and subsequent accomplishment of political aims were a result of a sound military strategy. Moltke began designing this strategy well before the declaration of war and as a result it was well formed by the time hostilities broke out. It contained all the elements of a good strategy; a diagnosis, a guiding principle, coherent action, suitability, and adaptability.

Prussian strategy for the Franco-Prussian War most certainly had a diagnosis. As early as 1857 Moltke saw war as a distinct possibility and began planning for it.[64] From 1857 until the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, Moltke continued to reference France as the most likely adversary for Prussia, specifically with an eye to defense from a French attack on the Prussian homeland.[65] This focus on defense no doubt arose from the fear of French invasion of or interference in Prussia, a fear backed up by historical precedence. As conflict with Austria brewed, Moltke expressed a perceived need to make a settlement with Austria in order to focus on the threat of France.[66] With Prussian success against Austria in the 1866 war, Moltke's views began to shift to an offensive war with France.[67] Planning efforts took a decidedly offensive bent from that point on, and Prussians completed their first formalized plan for an invasion of France in 1868.[68] From 1857 until the outbreak of the war, Moltke's diagnosis remained constant, despite conflict with

---

[64] Helmuth von Moltke, *Extracts from Moltke's Correspondence Pertaining to the War 1870-1871*, trans. Harry Bell (Fort Leavenworth, KS: The Army Schools Press, 1911), 1.

[65] Ibid., 18-20.

[66] Ibid., 85.

[67] Ibid., 117.

[68] Ibid., 129.

Austria or other events, war with France was always of primary concern and judged as the most dangerous threat to Prussian interests.

Moltke further developed a guiding principle for his strategy against France. As early as 1857, he posited that organization and readiness were key to beating France in a fight.[69] Likewise, he knew that the geography of the borders of France with the German States would restrict movement because movement through a neutral country would be unacceptable to the international community.[70] Realizing this, he planned for a concentrated march towards Paris with cavalry protection to force a fight with the French.[71] Moltke further analyzed the rail lines of both Prussia and France to determine most likely French movements and the most expedient routes to get Prussian Forces to the front.[72] Where rail lines did not exist for Prussia, the government built them to facilitate rapid troop movement. The guiding principle of Moltke's strategy then, consisted of exquisite organization and readiness to out-mobilize the French, move rapidly to the front, and conduct concentrated march towards Paris to force a fight with the French Army. As Rumelt prescribes, this guiding principle gave the overarching direction to Prussian actions in the Franco-Prussian War. The principle guided Prussian efforts in a specific direction without prescribing specific action.

To complement his guiding principle, Moltke also developed a set of coherent actions for the Prussian Army. Specifically, Moltke directed training and equipping of forces in certain ways

---

[69] Moltke, *Correspondence*, 3.

[70] W.D. Bird, *Strategy of the Franco-German War: 1870 up to the Battle of Sedan* (London: Hugh Rees LTD, 1909), 67.

[71] Ibid., 70.

[72] Moltke, *Correspondence*, 76-77.

to defeat the French. He began this process with an analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of both his own army and that of the French.[73] He directed specific training and recruiting efforts for Prussian forces[74] and discussed with Bismark the need for alliances with the southern German States to counter the strength of the French reserves.[75] Furthermore, the Prussians equipped their army for war with France incorporating both an analysis of French strengths and weaknesses and lessons learned from the Austro-Prussian War. The Prussians acquired improved breach-loading artillery that could outperform the French guns in range and accuracy to give them a marked advantage.[76] Additionally, taking lessons learned from the 1866 war where Moltke had been disappointed in the performance of his cavalry, he reformed the Prussian mounted units into a force more suited for scouting and protection than a heavy charge into an amassed enemy force.[77] The Prussian government also made the decision to purchase a horse for each cavalry soldier, which was not the norm among armies at the time. This opened up the Prussian mounted corps to talented men from all walks of life, not just those who could afford the expense of their own horse and livery.[78]

The efforts to train and equip the Prussian Army for war with France greatly enhanced their effectiveness throughout the Franco-Prussian War, aiding in their eventual victory and accomplishment of their aims. The training, breach-loading artillery, and cavalry reforms driven

---

[73] Moltke, *Correspondence*, 56.

[74] Ibid., 85.

[75] Bird, *Strategy of the Franco-Prussian War*, 67.

[76] Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 5-6.

[77] Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 60-61.

[78] Ibid., 63.

by Moltke and the alliance with Bavaria completed by Bismarck represent clear coherent actions without demanding specific tactical direction. Additionally, Moltke's initial 1868 war plans, which directed initial movements in a war with France, represent additional coherent actions directed in Prussian strategy. While the Prussian strategy did not state any clear "gateway goals," the short duration and localized nature of the conflict did not necessarily require any. Had the conflict continued for longer than it did or spread beyond France to a wider conflict, Prussia would need to readdress its need for intermediate goals. All the other elements of coherent action discussed are in line with Rumelt's idea of what coherent action in strategy should be.

Judging the suitability of the Prussian strategy for war with France is relatively simple. Prussia chose a threat-based strategy for war with France, developed and planned it for years before the conflict, and when war did occur they implemented the strategy and successfully achieved their goals of a unified German state, gaining the territory of Alsace-Lorraine in a mere six months. Clearly, the strategy developed was suitable to the conflict.

The final element of Prussian strategy to evaluate in the Franco-Prussian War is adaptability. Prussian actions after the battle of Sedan demonstrated the adaptability of their strategy. When Napoleon III was captured, Prussian leadership fully expected the war to end on favorable terms for Prussia. What Moltke, Bismarck, and Kaiser Wilhelm did not expect was the revolutionary feelings stirring in Paris that spawned a new government not inclined to negotiate with them. The republican government continued to hold out after the surrender of French forces at Metz, furthering Prussia's surprise. The Prussian strategy showed adaptability when Moltke continued on to the siege of Paris and again when they adapted their artillery tactics to the bombardment of Paris to hasten the ultimate end of the war.

Prussian Strategy for the war with France in 1870 clearly meets all of the tenets established earlier in this monograph for good strategy. It contained a diagnosis, a guiding

principle, and coherent actions. Additionally it showed suitability in use and adaptability to unforeseen circumstances. As this was a strategy that was geared to a certain threat and used against that threat, this is unsurprising. If there is a known threat, it is relatively easier to build a strategy around it for planning and force development. This, however, will not always be the case for every situation. Despite this, strategists can build a similar threat-based strategy for a more complex threat environment as in the example of the United States in the interwar years shows.

Threat-Based Planning in an Uncertain World: US Military Strategy in the Interwar Years

The common narrative of the United States' entry into World War II is one of an isolationist, peaceful country suddenly and treacherously attacked at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This attack by Japan then forced a declaration of war by Japan's ally Germany and drew a reluctant country into a two-front war for the survival of democracy. The sleeping giant awoke with a terrible resolve.[79] The actuality of United States' entry into World War II is far more complicated. Although the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was in some ways a surprise, the US military, and to some extent the US government, had made plans and preparations for another war since the end of World War I in 1918. Much like the situation facing the United States immediately after the Cold War, however, US military strategists in the interwar years faced resistance to strategic planning on both social and political levels. The public bought into post-World War I the narrative that the era of war was over, while political leadership resisted any effort to focus on a specific enemy.[80] The result of this uncertain situation was a threat-based strategy initially not focused on any one threat, which strategists narrowed down as war approached.

World War II was a war on a scale unlike any previously experienced by the United States in its history. The war encompassed the globe, more broadly categorized into the European and Pacific Theaters of Operations. The United States entered both theaters as part of a

---

[79] William Safire, *Safire's Political Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 666. After The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto is often credited with declaring, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." This quotation has become popular in the United States narrative of the start of WWII despite a lack of any evidence that Admiral Yamamoto ever said or wrote it.

[80] Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940*, Association of the US Army Book (Annapolis, MD.: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 3.

wide coalition of states, the primary three being the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. From the beginning, the Allies made the decision to focus on Europe first in order to open up a second front against Germany and relieve pressure on the beleaguered Soviet Union.[81] This was aligned with the American plan proposed long before the war that prescribed a focus on Europe first for any two front war.[82] In Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom began a bombing campaign to weaken German industrial capacity while focusing ground combat efforts on North Africa. While doing little to relieve the pressure on the Soviet Union, the North Africa campaign gave the US Army a much-needed period to build forces and ease into the war after decades of disarmament.[83] A campaign to take Sicily and the Italian mainland was next, followed finally by the invasion at Normandy and push into Germany to end the war.

In the Pacific Theater of Operations, the United States, led by efforts of the US Navy and US Marines, initially engaged in defensive operations to regain their footing after the attack at Pearl Harbor. This was followed quickly by an island hopping campaign with the goal of continuing to take islands closer and closer to the Japanese home islands. This effort was an attempt to get airfields close enough to Japan proper to begin a bombing offensive to hasten the end of the war. Concurrently, the US Army effort in the Pacific, led by Gen Douglas MacArthur, followed a similar strategy in the Southwest Pacific. Finally, the US Army and Army Air Force

---

[81] Maurice Matloff, *The US Army in WWII: The War Department, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1959), 9.

[82] Steven T. Ross, *American War Plans 1919-1941*, vol. 2, *Plans for War against The British Empire and Japan: The Red, Orange, and Red-Orange Plans, 1923-1938* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992), 384.

[83] David Rigby, *Allied Master Strategists: The Combined Chiefs of Staff in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 62.

conducted support operations to Chinese resistance in the China-Burma-India Theater. The War against Japan concluded with the dropping of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

During the interwar years, the US military establishment faced resistance to a standing army and war planning in general from both the public and politicians. Disillusionment with Europe, eventual economic depression, and the absence of a clear enemy to the United States combined to create a retreat to isolationism in the country.[84] In this environment, US military leaders had the difficult task of creating a strategy for the future. The Army in particular had to determine whether to return to its long tradition of being a frontier force or use the brief experience in Europe to develop a more expeditionary mindset.[85] The general consensus among US military leaders was that advances in technology made it impossible for the United States to maintain a purely frontier force.[86] The problem they then faced was how to develop a strategy diagnosis outside the traditional frontier defense absent political and public support to do so and with no defined threat facing the United States. Their answer was detailed planning for multiple potential threats in what became known as the color plans.

Rather than provide the US military with a single diagnosis, the color plans provided them with multiple. Alfred Thayer Mahan initially proposed this type of contingency war planning in his reforms of the Naval War College.[87] The Army adopted this idea in 1904 with the opening of the Army War College and formal coordination between the two services began the

---

[84] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 4.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 8.

[87] Keith T. Ressa, "US VS the World: America's Color Coded War Plans and the Evolution of Rainbow 5" (Master's Thesis, Liberty University, 2010), 5.

same year through the direction of the Joint Board.[88] The Joint Board directed the development of the color plans from then on with plans developed for a wide variety of potential adversaries. The initial set of plans in 1904 were Red for Great Britain, Black for Germany, Orange for Japan, White for France, Yellow for Spain, Grey for Italy, Green for Russia, Crimson for Austria-Hungary, and Saffron for China. Post World War I changes and additions were made so that France was Gold, Spain was Olive, China was Yellow, Italy was Silver, Central America and the Caribbean were Grey, Russia was Purple, Mexico Green, Canada Crimson, and South America Violet. Finally, a Philippine insurgency was denoted as Brown and a domestic insurgency was White.[89] When the US military needed a diagnosis for their strategic planning in the interwar years, the color plans provided a ready outlet.

While the US public and politicians eschewed any thought or preparations for war, the US Army and Navy conducted continuous replanning of the color plans at their respective war colleges. This occurred even in the absence of any readily identifiable enemy.[90] These mental exercises gave war planners and future military leaders an idea of what the United States would need materially, tactically, and operationally in a future one on one conflict against a wide range of adversaries, if only theoretically. In addition to providing mental shaping for the future leaders of their services, the color plans did not merely remain training exercises at the war colleges. The chronically undermanned general staff often requested that the annual war college planning exercises serve as the forum to rewrite actual war plans.[91] Thus, the color plans spread beyond the walls of academia to the heart of military preparation at the general staff.

---

[88] Ressa, "US VS the World," 6.

[89] Ibid., 6-7.

[90] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, xvii-xviii.

As the interwar years wore on, the strategic diagnosis began to narrow as war loomed in Europe and the Pacific. The United States could identify a clearer adversary as Germany and Japan demonstrated a willingness to use force to attain their political aims. In 1934, strategists identified a need for participation with allies and incorporated such factors into planning exercises.[92] Beginning in 1938 the Rainbow Plans incorporated allied participation into a variety of scenarios. Even so, as late as 1939 the primary focus on planning for a potential war with either axis power was limited to a Monroe Doctrine defense of the Western Hemisphere.[93] In fact, of the five Rainbow Plans, only Rainbow 5 involved United States participation beyond the defense of the Western Hemisphere or immediate US possessions.[94] It was not until the Lend Lease Act of March 11, 1941 that US policy officially began to shift away from hemispheric defense and include a more active interest in Europe.[95] With this shift, the US military diagnosis would also officially narrow to a war in Europe to support French and British allies with the potential for a two front war in the Pacific. This most closely resembled the Rainbow 5 Plan with a potential for Plan Orange against Japan.[96] These decisions had their basis in the long held belief that Japan would go on the defensive after taking Asia with all its resources, but would not pose a real threat to US territories.[97] The 1940 War College plan developed to cover this combination of

[91] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 113.

[92] Ibid., xix.

[93] Steven T. Ross, *American War Plans 1919-1941*, vol. 3, *Plans to Meet the Axis Threat, 1939-1940* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992), 71.

[94] Steven T. Ross, *American War Plans 1919-1941*, vol. 5, *Plans for Global War: Rainbow-5 and the Victory Program, 1941* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992), 6.

[95] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 15.

[96] Ibid., 120.

previous plans was called Rainbow X and covered the basic elements that encompassed US military strategy in World War II.[98]

As a result of the US military's drawn out and fluid diagnosis process during the interwar period, the guiding principle turned out rather piecemeal. The Army, Army Air Corps, and Navy each developed independent guiding principles and eventually combined them to form the overall guiding principle for World War II. These guiding principles were the idea of "Europe first," mobility, strategic bombing, and amphibious island hopping.

The US Army's guiding principle began with the idea of tackling any conflict in Europe first in any future war that involved more than one front. As early as 1934, the Army War College was conducting planning exercises for a two-front war in Europe and the Pacific.[99] Planners determined in the 1935 exercise that if that type of war were to occur Europe should be the first effort and the idea stuck through subsequent iterations of the exercise.[100] This was due to the increasing unease regarding German actions and the perception that Germany, or any European military for that matter, would be a far tougher opponent than Japan.[101] In addition to Europe first, the US Army's guiding principle was rooted in ideas of mobility. This was the result of the rise of what became known as Blitzkrieg in German military thought. In the absence of the ability to actually rearm, the Army conducted multiple studies on mobility culminating in a G4 directive

---

[97] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 157.

[98] Ibid., 114.

[99] Ibid., 152.

[100] Ibid., xvii.

[101] Ibid., 157.

on August 20th, 1940 which called for studies of specific weapons systems to enable a fast moving Army with the ability to protect itself from a mobile foe.[102]

The Army Air Corps similarly based their guiding principle in a Europe first idea, but focused on strategic bombing rather than mobility. Air planners of the interwar years pushed for such a force in the belief that strategic bombing could end a war far more quickly and effectively than any other type of military force. While part of this desire no doubt stemmed from a need to prove why the United States should have an independent air force, Air Corps leadership truly believed the ideas of Billy Mitchell and Guilio Douhet described the future of warfare.[103] The guiding principle of strategic bombing shaped Air Corps policy and development throughout the interwar years even when little funding was available for research and Congress directed the Air Corps to not even research strategic bombing.[104]

As the Army and Army Air Corps focused on a European war, the US Navy's guiding policy was based firmly on a Pacific war with Japan. The Navy did not see likely a challenger in Europe but saw itself as a first line of defense in the Pacific.[105] In addition to defending the United States and its territories, the Marine Corps wing of the Navy greatly shaped the service's guiding policy with its inclusion of amphibious island hopping. Shortly after WWI, the Commandant of the Marine Corps tasked Major Pete Ellis with drafting the Marine Corps efforts for the Navy's War Plan Orange. By 1921 the plan, called "Advanced Base Force Operations in

---

[102] Mark Watson, *The US Army in WWII: The War Department, Prewar Plans and Preparation* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 52.

[103] John Frisbee, *Makers of the United States Air Force* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1996), 77.

[104] Watson, *The US Army in WWII*, 35-36.

[105] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 11.

Micronesia," was complete. Labeled Operations Plan 712, it called for a series of large ship to shore movements to seize strategically placed islands ever closer to Japan to use as bases of operations for future attacks against the Japanese home islands.[106] The Marine Corps contribution to the Navy's planning efforts became the focus of the Navy's guiding policy, as Navy carrier and battle group efforts focused on pushing ever further into the Pacific for the Marines to take and hold a string of islands leading to Japan.

As war neared, these diverse guiding principles coalesced into a combination that carried the US military forward into World War II. To support these guiding principles the services developed several coherent actions. These included a peacetime draft, research and development, weapons acquisitions, public outreach, and exercises.

Following World War I the US military, and particularly the US Army, rapidly demobilized and decreased in size. Starting in 1919 and continuing for almost fifteen years, the Army underwent a period of significant decrease in size and capability.[107] Public hostility towards any increase in military budgets or size during the interwar years greatly restricted what the military could do.[108] When able to recruit troops, those troops were often shifted to the Navy or the Air Corps because leadership viewed those services to be the first responders in any sort of defense crisis.[109] The men who did make it into any branch of the lacked modern weapons and equipment for training.[110] While military leaders recognized the growing problem of an

---

[106] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 12.

[107] Watson, *The US Army in WWII*, 15.

[108] Ibid., 5.

[109] Ibid., 11.

[110] Ibid., 10.

undersized and poorly equipped military, political leaders remained focused on other issues until a widening war in Europe forced their hand.[111] Even then, it was concern over a need to defend the Western Hemisphere against German or Japanese aggression that finally spurred Congress to act and authorize the Selective Service Act.[112] Troop strength increased dramatically following the act's passage on August 27, 1940. For example, the US Army's size nearly tripled during 1941, going from a total strength of 620,744 in December 1940 to 1,644,212 on November 30, 1941. The nation's first peacetime draft gave the US military the ability to begin increasing strength, even absent a clearly defined enemy, and became one of the key parts of its strategic coherent action.

Another aspect of the US military's coherent action during the interwar years was research and development. While funds were not often available to purchase new weapons systems, the services conducted regular research into various weapons systems to prepare for a future when money became available. Occasionally, the military would need to find creative ways to fund their efforts and skirt restrictions placed upon them. For example, the Air Corps conducted extensive research into long-range bomber aircraft throughout the interwar years, but Congress regularly limited their efforts. Despite this, the Air Corps managed to develop and keep plans on file for the B-17 and other long-range bombers so the aircraft could enter production when needed.[113] Likewise, the Army set multiple research and development priorities for a wide

---

[111] Watson, *The US Army in WWII*, 185.

[112] Ibid., 193.

[113] Ibid, 35-36. Some may argue that the Air Corps was following a capabilities-based strategy. Indeed, Air Corps leadership saw strategic bombing as the way to win any war. Arguing this is a capabilities-based strategy, however, would be akin to arguing the Navy followed a capabilities-based strategy because they sought to buy ships. Any threat-based strategy has some capabilities inherent in it. In the case of the Air Corps, strategic bombers were the needed equipment for the various threats planned for in the Color and Rainbow plans.

range of new equipment in 1936 but Congressional action limited them by including a budget

proviso that made it illegal request any amount of money beyond what congress had

preapproved.[114] To get around these limitations, the services developed several creative

approaches. These included developing "educational orders" to shift limited funds into research

with civilian companies and establishing partnerships with industry to entice them to spend their

own money on research for future acquisitions.[115] Such solutions allowed the US military to

continue research and development as an aspect of coherent action despite multiple budget and

political limitations to do so.

The acquisitions process that generally follows research and development programs faced

great delays in the interwar years. Despite multiple calls to rearm by US military leaders,

Congress generally allotted little or no funds for doing so. They received a glimmer of hope in

1929 when President Hoover directed a study into what equipment the military needed, but the

economic crisis caused by the stock market crash of 1929 ensured the quick demise of the

study.[116] Despite this, the military purchased older model equipment in limited numbers to use

what they could until more funds were available. The lack of the most up to date equipment

caused some public consternation when the United States eventually entered the war, but this in

fact allowed the purchase of better and newer equipment than if the country had rearmed

earlier.[117] Acquisition programs and rearmament began in earnest in July 1941 when President

---

[114] Watson, *The US Army in WWII*, 22 and 43.

[115] Ibid., 34 and 49.

[116] Ibid., 23.

[117] Ibid., 10.

Roosevelt directed rearmament under the Victory Program.[118] It is important to note that this rearmament was not tied to one specific threat, as President Roosevelt's directive stated that acquisition programs be based on an analysis of all potential enemies and their capabilities.[119] The groundwork laid with industry partnerships and the lines of communication established through purchases of older equipment set the stage for large-scale rearmament and constituted an important aspect of coherent action.

Public outreach to spread the word about the important role the military played in national defense was another aspect of coherent action that greatly aided acquisitions, research and development. The goal of this aspect of coherent action during the interwar years was to change public opinion about the need for military funding and rearmament and, in turn, change Congressional opinion. The Army Air Corps was particularly adept at this. In addition to convincing industry to work on new aircraft designs though partnerships and public displays of Air Corps pilots' abilities in air races and other open events, public relations efforts by the Air Corps led to the public's vocal desire for an independent Air Force. As a result the Army Air Corps was reorganized into the Army Air Force in June 1941 and granted additional autonomy.[120] The coherent action of these and other public outreach efforts worked to allow the military some leeway to train and rearm during lean the lean years of the 1930s.

The final aspect of coherent action taken by the US military during the interwar years was exercises to train the respective services for future conflict. Of the services, the Navy was the first to conduct exercises and the most prolific. Beginning in 1921, the Navy and its Marine Corps

---

[118] Ross, *American War Plans* Vol. 5, 146-147.

[119] Watson, *The US Army in WWII*, 339.

[120] Ibid., 289.

component conducted annual large fleet battles and amphibious landings. These exercises were suspended from 1926-1934 due to the costs associated, but were then restarted and continued to validate the concept that Ellis outlined in 1921.[121] Due mainly to limited manpower, the Army developed a regimented exercise program much later than the Navy. While throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Army conducted infrequent and often lackluster exercises with undermanned units, its first corps size maneuver since 1918 did not occur until April 1940.[122] The Army conducted large exercises frequently after that, and beginning in the summer of 1940 replicated battlefield conditions in Europe.[123] These exercises prepared the US military for the upcoming war by allowing the development and integration between the various branches and services. When the war arrived, combat tested this preparation and the strategy as a whole for its suitability and adaptability.

The strategy that the US military developed during the interwar years proved suitable in practice during World War II. The United States fought with essentially the same strategy its military planners had been developing since the end of World War I. The Army Air Force, in combination with the British Royal Air Force, bombarded Germany with a massive strategic bombing campaign bringing their industry to its knees. The Army fought as a mobile mechanized force in a way that was unthinkable even a couple years prior, and in concert with allied forces, eventually forcing German surrender. In the Pacific, the Navy, Marines, and Army conducted an island hopping campaign that drew them ever closer to the Japanese home islands and final victory. Throughout the war, the policy of Europe first developed in a theoretical exercise seven

---

[121] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow*, 12.

[122] Watson, *The US Army in WWII*, 204.

[123] Ibid., 209.

years prior to the outbreak of hostilities guided US military actions. With the exception of the US Navy's early diagnosis of Japan as the most likely enemy in the Pacific, all of these elements of strategy and the coherent actions taken to prepare for them were conducted in the absence of a clear threat to the United States. The official policy of the nation until 1941 was to focus on hemispheric defense, but the US military was still able to develop a coherent strategy that the nation then used to accomplish the its goals in World War II, albeit with some adaption along the way.[124]

Furthermore, the strategy developed during the interwar years proved adaptable in use during World War II. While the conduct of the war hewed fairly closely to the strategic plan, several areas of adaptation did occur. First, the Army Air Force adapted its strategic bombing campaign against Germany for use against Japan. In fact, by the end of the war the primary goal of the island hopping campaign was to seize islands within range of Japan for use as bomber bases.[125] Additionally, the air service finally realized its dream of a high altitude pressurized bomber for trans-Atlantic strikes during the war in the B-29, but the aircraft were used almost exclusively in the Pacific theater of the war.[126]

---

[124] Gole, *The Road to Rainbow,* 15. Gole argues that the Lend Lease Act of March 11th 1941 marked the official end of US isolationism and hemispheric defense policy. He further shows that even the peacetime draft enacted a year prior was to prepare the military to defend the Western Hemisphere from outside aggression, not to deploy an expeditionary force to Europe or the Pacific.

[125] Stanley Sandler, *World War II in the Pacific: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 272-76.

[126] Paul M. Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (New York: Random House, 2013), 326-327. There was limited use of the B-29 in the China-Burma-India theater of the war for basing to attack Japan prior to Pacific islands being in range.

The second area of adaptation also occurred in the Pacific theater. In the Southwest Pacific, the US Army adopted the Navy's island hopping technique to liberate that portion of the theater. Initially a debate arose among military planners over whether the central or southern Pacific route would be the better course for the primary island hopping push. Although the Army agreed with adapting the Navy's plan, higher command selected the central Pacific route through Micronesia as the primary because they viewed it as the more tactically achievable and because it avoided putting the difficult Douglas MacArthur in charge of the theater.[127] Additionally, both the Pacific island hopping campaign and the European campaign showed the final area of adaptation in the strategy of the US military, gateway goals.

Rumelt described gateway goals as part of the coherent action aspect of his kernel of strategy; proximate objectives to move the strategy forward to its ultimate goal when that ultimate goal is initially unattainable. As the United States developed a large part of its strategy absent a specific adversary or problem, setting gateway goals before the outbreak of war was not possible. One exception was the Navy's island hopping campaign that was an entire series of proximate objectives moving closer to Japan in the strategy identified by Ellis in 1921. Both the Pacific and European theaters did adapt and adopt other gateway goals once hostilities began. In both theaters, the US military could not immediately conduct its desired campaigns in Micronesia and northern France due to the Navy's losses at Pearl Harbor and the Army's delayed rearming. Instead, the New Guinea and Mediterranean campaigns offered proximate objectives that gave the US military much needed practice and time to rebuild while still taking the fight to Germany and Japan.[128]

---

[127] Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 303-305.

[128] Ibid., 301.

The United States developed their military strategy during the interwar years in the face of firm resistance to any military rearmament or expansion from both the public and politicians. As a result, the US military developed a threat-based strategy based on a broad range of threats in intellectual planning exercises at the Army and Navy War Colleges. These were supplemented with some measures of capabilities-based thought shown in the strategic bombing and island-hopping examples and then later adapted into varied guiding policies and coherent actions in each service. The services combined their work into one coherent strategy when war became imminent. The United States then used this strategy during World War II where it proved both suitable and adaptable to the tasks at hand. While at first glance this would seem to show that a threat-based military strategy in the absence of a clear threat can be used effectively, the development of US interwar strategy was not quite as easy as it sounds at first read. It was only possible in this case due to the strategic development consisting of largely intellectual exercises with limited industrial partnerships to spur research and development. This was a situation forced on the US military in the interwar years due to economic depression and political pressure, but in less sparse times would require enormous fiscal and political restraint.

The conditions that allowed the US military to develop a threat-based strategy in a complex environment were beneficial to strategic development at the time, but will not always be present in every scenario. When faced with a complex system and a public and political structure that demand some sort of action, an alternate approach to strategic planning in a complex threat environment is needed. Capabilities-based strategy is an example of this, as demonstrated by Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

Capabilities-Based Strategy in Action: The 1973 Arab-Israeli War

As capabilities-based strategies are largely a development of the last two and a half decades, there are few in-depth historical case studies. Israeli strategy between 1967 and the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, however, is a case that affords a unique perspective of a capabilities-based strategy put to use. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) adopted a capabilities-based strategy following their overwhelming victory in the 1967 Six Days War. This victory left Israel with a perception that no credible enemy or coalition of enemies could overcome the IDF. Thus the IDF saw a reliance on intelligence, air force, and armor capabilities for any future conflict as a deterrent to neighbors and the answer to any threat that could arise, however unlikely.[129] It was this strategy that Israel carried with it into October 1973.

In the early afternoon of October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a two-front attack on Israel with only nine and a half hours of warning provided by Israeli intelligence. This caught Israel off-guard and in the early stages of mobilization.[130] Egyptian forces in the south used innovative engineering techniques to cross the Suez Canal into the Sinai days earlier than anticipated by the Israelis.[131] The attackers then bypassed strongholds on the Israeli defenses, the Bar lev Line, and seized the east bank and strategic locations several kilometers into the Sinai with units armed with advanced antitank weaponry to ambush Israeli armor moving into the

---

[129] George Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: The Albatross of Decisive Victory*, Levenworth Papers 21 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1996), 5.

[130] Ibid., 27.

[131] Frank Aker, *October 1973: The Arab-Israeli War* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985), 28.

area.[132] At the same time, Egypt's new air defense systems acquired from the Soviet Union negated Israeli dominance in the air and deprived IDF ground forces of crucial air support.[133]

The IDF's response proved to be disorganized as both the Egyptian air defense system and antitank ambushes were completely unexpected by Israel.[134] Additionally, the fact that the war began on the Yom Kippur holiday further delayed and complicated the mobilization of the Israeli reserve.[135] With poor morale, Israeli forces began a counterattack on October 8 and failed miserably. The fierceness of the Egyptian defense and the thickness of their artillery barrage stalled the IDF's advance.[136] On the following day, Major General Ariel Sharon attempted another advance despite receiving orders not to, but it too stalled out in a battle of attrition.[137] Stalemate or worse threatened the IDF until Egypt blundered on October 12. Responding to Syrian pressure, the Egyptians launched an attack further into the Sinai in to relieve pressure on the northern front. The advance stretched Egypt's military too far and opened an opportunity for Israel to break the stalemate. Egyptian forces fared much worse in an offensive role against IDF armor and by October 14 were in full retreat back to the Suez crossing points.[138] For the next ten days, the IDF pushed Egypt back under stiff resistance and managed to stage a counter crossing of the Suez, cutting off and surrounding the Egyptian 3rd Army.[139]

---

[132] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 28.

[133] Aker, *October 1973*, 27.

[134] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 33.

[135] Ibid., 30.

[136] Aker, *October 1973*, 39-40.

[137] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 54.

[138] Ibid., 56-57.

On the northern front, the IDF was similarly surprised. Much as in the Sinai, Syrian forces used Russian made air defense systems to negate the IDF's air arm, and antitank weapons to inflict casualties upon Israeli armor.[140] After initial Syrian gains, the IDF turned the tide on October 10, pushing rapidly into Syria. The IDF eventually came within thirty-five kilometers of Damascus a week after the outbreak of hostilities.[141] This spurred the call for help to the Egyptians, causing them to make their fatal blunder. The hostilities on both fronts came to a close on October 25 with a cease fire brokered by the United States who became involved due to an oil embargo orchestrated by the Egyptians.[142] In subsequent negotiations, Egypt attained its aims of regaining the Sinai, achieving closer relationships with the West, and earning prestige for standing up to Israel. Meanwhile, Israel was left to figure out what had gone wrong.[143]

The IDF's struggles during the first phase of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War were the result of its shift to a capabilities-based strategy following the Six Days War. While this strategy contained all of the necessary elements, it had three primary flaws that led to unexpected consequences for the IDF. First, it featured an incomplete diagnosis. Second, it had a potentially flawed guiding principle and coherent action that favored some technologically advanced capabilities to the point of neglecting more traditional ones. Third, the strategy was not adaptable to unforeseen situations as they occurred.

---

[139] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 60-67.

[140] Elizabeth Monroe and A.H. Farrar-Hockley, *The Arab-Israel War: October 1973 Background and Events*, Adelphi Papers 111 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975), 28.

[141] Ibid., 25-26.

[142] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 71-73.

[143] Ibid., 79-81.

Following the 1967 Six Days War, the Israeli public, politicians, and military felt that the IDF was an unmatched force in the region. In that conflict, Israel triumphed over the combined armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It fought surrounded and outnumbered and won dramatically, emerging as a near superpower in the region.[144] The IDF's victory was the result of a reliance on three key capabilities: intelligence, the air force, and armored forces.[145] Whereas prior to the Six Days War Israeli strategy had focused on gaining more defensible borders from specific enemies, the overwhelming victory caused the IDF to shift to a strategy focused on the capabilities that had decided the conflict. The resultant diagnosis was that Israel was by far the most powerful military force in the region and that no Arab state or coalition of states could threaten it. With the perception of no true major threat, the focus of Israel's strategy was to enhance the capabilities that had performed so admirably previously and use them as a deterrent.[146] In the unlikely event that an attack did occur, the IDF would use those capabilities to achieve a quick, decisive victory with minimal casualties.[147] This strategic diagnosis was an incomplete one. While it correctly identified Israel's strategic situation and military strengths at the end of the Six Days War, it failed to identify a problem or issue, as Rumelt prescribes. Additionally, in a bout of overconfidence, the Israelis neglected to leave the door open to the possibility of changes in the strategic situation.

---

[144] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 1.

[145] Ibid., 5.

[146] David Wurmser, "The Evolution of Israeli Grand Strategy: Strategy and Tactics and the Confluence with Democratic Philosophy" (PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1990), 98.

[147] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 1.

With this incomplete diagnosis for a capabilities-based strategy, the IDF committed to a guiding policy focusing on the three pillars that had won its last war, intelligence, air force, and armor. The IDF relied on its intelligence apparatus, Aman, to provide accurate warning of an attack with no fewer than seventy-two hours' notice of an impending attack.[148] Three days of warning allowed the IDF to mobilize its reserves in time to be a factor in the first few days of any conflict. This was a shift from earlier strategies where the IDF had expected little or no warning and to fight for seventy-two hours without its reserves.[149] The problem with this new focus on intelligence capabilities was that it proved susceptible to deception and misinterpretation, a possibility the IDF did not recognized before 1973.[150] Israel's enemies, Egypt in particular, took advantage of Israel's gap in thought. Egypt concealed their mobilization under the cover of announced annual maneuvers, and Israeli intelligence rejected cues from the Syrian mobilization, believing it too unlikely that an Arab state would start a war.[151] Thus, Egyptian planning and Israeli blunders negated the first pillar of IDF guiding policy and the attack achieved almost complete surprise.

The second pillar of Israeli guiding policy was its reliance on the air force. In the Six Days War, the IDF's air force almost completely destroyed three Arab air forces while taking minimal losses. This was a result of well-trained pilots and detailed planning more than air force technological capabilities. Nonetheless, the IDF spent a lot of money on improving its aircraft and increasing their numbers between 1967 and 1973.[152] Of particular note, the Israelis put great

---

[148] Wurmser, "The Evolution of Israeli Grand Strategy," 104.

[149] Ibid., 104.

[150] Ibid., 133-114.

[151] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 23-25.

weight upon the acquisition of the United States made F-4 Phantom seeing it as an unbeatable

aircraft that would ensure deterrence.[153] Recognizing Israeli superiority in the air, Egypt

purchased advanced Soviet made air defense systems against which Israeli pilots had no previous

experience.[154] In particular, the mobile SA-6 surface to air missile (SAM) system and ZSU-23-4

anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) wreaked havoc upon IDF aircraft in the 1973 war, inflicting heavy

losses.[155] The situation was similar on the Syrian front as mobile SAMs ambushed high altitude

aircraft and AAA engaged those that flew low to avoid the SAMs. The staggering number of

losses were intolerable and, at one point, the IDF air force temporarily suspended flying to confer

on the best way to proceed in the conflict.[156] The dense air defenses forced Israeli pilots trained to

support IDF ground forces to focus on defending themselves, leaving IDF armor on the ground

vulnerable.[157] Advances in adversary defensive technology negated the IDF's keenly acquired air

capabilities.

Similarly, the final pillar of Israeli guiding policy, armor, performed superbly during the

Six Day War. In 1967, IDF armor spearheaded a breakthrough and speedy advance across the

desert with no infantry support, contributing greatly to the defeat of Arab forces. As a result, the

IDF put greater emphasis on armor in the ensuing years.[158] Armor capabilities would ensure

---

[152] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 7.

[153] Wurmser, "The Evolution of Israeli Grand Strategy," 100.

[154] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 19.

[155] Ibid., 33.

[156] Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, *The Arab-Israeli War*, 23.

[157] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 33.

[158] Ibid., 7.

similar penetrations and rapid advances in future conflicts to ensure Israeli victory or deter enemy action.[159] The use of Sagger anti-tank weapons by Egypt and Syria, however, had a similar effect on IDF armor capabilities as the SAMs had had on their aircraft. As IDF armored forces raced to the Suez Canal to relieve the besieged Bar Lev line, Egyptian forces ambushed them and inflicted unexpected losses.[160] On the northern front the Syrians did not use anti-tank weapons as effectively, but rocky terrain limited the speed of armored movement.[161] Additionally, Israel relied on its air force as airborne artillery to support its mobile armored force as it operated independently.[162] The Syrian air defense system effectively removed this support in 1973 and wreaked havoc on Israeli aircraft. Once again, enemy technology and some amount of chance negated an IDF critical capability.

Prior to the 1973 war, the IDF took several coherent actions in line with the guiding policy they established for themselves. To increase air capabilities, Israel increased the number of fighter aircraft by more than a third between 1967 and 1973. In 1973, over half of the IDF's budget went to the air force. Additionally, the IDF placed a premium on acquiring advanced United States made fighters to replace older French models. Furthermore, Israeli pilots received extensive training and far outpaced the surrounding Arab countries in flight hours.[163] For ground forces, the IDF placed such an emphasis on armor that infantry, artillery, and support units were regularly converted to armor units.[164] While this increased the number of armored units available,

---

[159] Wurmser, "The Evolution of Israeli Grand Strategy," 98.

[160] Aker, *October 1973*, 26.

[161] Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, *The Arab-Israeli War*, 22.

[162] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War*, 8.

[163] Ibid., 7.

the IDF neglected the sustainment of other areas of the Army, particularly infantry and artillery, forcing the armored units to rely on air force support and good terrain. These coherent actions fulfilled the strategic vision of Israeli guiding policy, but did not correct for the flaws in that policy.

As a result of an incomplete diagnosis, flawed guiding policy and coherent action, the capabilities-based strategy developed by the IDF between 1967 and 1973 proved unsuitable during wartime. Israeli overconfidence in their ability to defeat any potential enemy in the region led them to avoid a full diagnosis of a most likely enemy and thus overlook developments in the militaries of those countries. Additionally, Egypt and Syria, through deception and their own technological advancements, took advantage of Israeli reliance on accurate intelligence and technological capabilities, key strengths for the IDF in previous conflicts. Finally, Israeli actions to fulfill their guiding policy did not correct for the flaws in their guiding policy, and in the case of neglecting other ground forces for armor, potentially made the situation worse. All of these factors contributed to major Israeli losses. While Israel held the initiative at the end of the war, Egypt's political maneuvering and the domestic turmoil in Israel resulting from the war allowed Egypt to accomplish all their national goals, thus showing the unsuitability of IDF strategy.

In addition to being unsuitable to the conflict at hand, the Israeli strategy was not adaptable to unforeseen circumstances. On the Syrian front, Israeli forces were surprised despite clear indications of impending hostilities.[165] The IDF reversed the early success of the Syrians within a week, but it was due as much to Syrian missteps as IDF skill. Likewise in the Sinai, Israel was also caught by surprise and took heavy losses. The IDF only reversed their fortunes

---

[164] Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War,* 7.

[165] Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, *The Arab-Israeli War*, 22.

when the Egyptians departed from their original strategy and provided the IDF an opportunity for battle in the open desert when the Egyptians made a push for the Sinai passes. On both fronts the IDF did not adapt its strategy, but instead continued its original capabilities-based strategy only to regain ground when its adversaries made critical blunders.

After the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six Days War, the IDF based their strategy firmly in their experiences during that conflict. The overconfidence engendered by their outsized victory led to the idea that no enemy or combination of enemies in the region could threaten Israel and thus a capabilities-based strategy resting on intelligence, air, and armor capabilities prevailed. This strategy held an incomplete diagnosis, included flawed guiding policy and coherent action, and proved unsuitable and not adaptable in combat. As a result of Egyptian and Syrian actions in 1973, the IDF was caught off guard and took heavy losses, faced an erosion of confidence in their abilities, and Israel as a whole eventually lost the Sinai Peninsula in subsequent negotiations.

Conclusions

Having studied three diverse case studies in military strategy, can we determine if one type of strategy is better than another? The answer is a rousing "it depends." This is not to make light of the situation or to lessen the impact of the case studies. Rather, this conclusion illustrates an important point about the environment in which strategists form and implement strategies. That is, every situation is different and therefore every strategy formed is based on a set of unique conditions specific to a particular situation. Each of the three case studies are strategies unique to their time, location, and purpose. As such, we cannot develop a single template or model from them to use across all other situations. We can, however, draw several lessons from the studies that strategists can use to frame future strategic development.

In the example of Prussian strategy in the Franco-Prussian War we examined a case of threat-based strategic planning for a known opponent. This case study met all of the theoretical criteria for being a good strategy and was ultimately successful in its aims. Thus on the surface it seems to indicate that following a threat-based strategy would lead to success. Placing the Prussian example in a modern context, however, does not work. While the international system is just as complex now as it ever was, the ways that nations, in particular Western democracies, operate within that system has changed since 1870.

The unique brand of *Realpolitik* practiced by Bismarck in nineteenth century Prussia lent itself to directions a modern democracy could not feasibly take in developing a strategy. Specifically, while Prussian actions portrayed France as the aggressor, Prussia itself was the aggressor in the conflict. As the aggressor, Moltke and his staff knew well ahead of time that a war with France would eventually come and could develop a sound strategy for it. Twenty-first century democracies generally focus on maintaining a peaceful and stable international order rather than trying to force a change as Prussia attempted. Thus, modern democracies will tend not

to agitate for a war in the way Bismarck did. As a result, strategists most likely will not receive early guidance on an opponent unless there is a clear enemy openly preparing for war against them, another unlikely case.

Another problematic issue with the Prussian strategy of 1870 is that although it accomplished its stated aims and was successful in gaining Prussia's political objectives, the strategy ultimately led to less than optimal conditions for the newly united Germany. The unification of Germany and annexation of the Alsace-Lorraine territory at the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War left Germany with a still-powerful France that would eventually seek to regain its lost territory. This factor, in addition to the shift in European balance of power due to the cumulative effects of Prussian wars with Austria and France, set the conditions for World War I.[166] Germany ultimately did not prevail in that war and French and Allied treatment of Germany post war set the conditions for World War II and the ultimate partition of Germany for five decades. Viewed through the lens of Dolman's idea that strategy is a continuous effort to gain a position of advantage, Prussian strategy was ultimately not effective because the results were merely temporary. Again, the fact that the results of the strategy were temporary does not mean that such a strategy will always lead to failure.

The true lesson military strategists can glean from the Prussian case study is the effectiveness of in-depth planning exercises and the adaptation of those strategies as war nears and new information becomes available. Moltke began planning for a war with France on paper long before a war was politically feasible. When new information became available in the form of lessons learned from the Austro-Prussian War, he changed elements of the strategy, particularly

---

[166] Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *Successful Strategies: Triumphing in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 222-25.

in the areas of cavalry and artillery acquisitions and employment. The result was a well-developed strategy for use in the war with France when it occurred. Although Moltke had the advantage of knowing Bismarck's long-term goal to force a war with France, the lesson still applies in the modern context. Long-term strategic planning shapes how forces operate and allows a basis for adaptation as new circumstances occur. The United States did precisely that to develop a successful threat-based strategy during the interwar years prior to World War II.

The interwar military strategy of the United States was threat-based and developed in an uncertain threat environment, and included certain capabilities to meet the challenges posed by theoretical threats. It met all the theoretical criteria for a good strategy and proved suitable and adaptable in use during World War II. Much like the Prussian strategy in 1870, however, the US interwar strategy was one specific to its time. The US interwar strategy evolved as it did because of economic and political pressures during the interwar years that forced the US military to improvise.

Following World War I, there was overwhelming pressure from the American public to retreat to traditional isolationism as well as acceptance of the narrative that World War I had been the war to end all wars. The US Congress, representing their constituents, also held these views. As a result, Congress placed severe restrictions on what the US military could do. The Great Depression further limited the economic means available for military development. Due to these factors, the US military built a strategy based on planning exercises for a wide variety of threats and innovative ideas more than actual acquisitions or preparations for one specific threat. The military then enacted these ideas and plans as a specific threat became more apparent.

While the restrictions placed on the US military limited their action for several decades, they also effectively forced strategists to take creative approaches to develop a threat-based strategy. This will not always be then case and thus the interwar US strategic approach can also

not necessarily be copied in another situation. In a modern environment where the public does not seek isolationism, the political body feels pressure to do something in almost every situation, and industry eagerly sells a perceived solution to every perceived problem, the military may not have the luxury of an insulated environment in which to develop a threat-based strategy based in large part on theoretical planning. In such a system, the systemic pull to acquire capabilities that promise a solution to any problem without fully developing a strategy around those capabilities can be great.

There is, however, an important lesson in the case of US interwar strategy that is applicable to future strategic development. First, the interwar case study reiterates the lesson of long-term strategic planning from the Franco-Prussian war, but also greatly expands upon it. Instead of planning for one threat well in advance like the Prussians, the US military planned for almost every threat and did so repeatedly in a series of planning exercises conducted at various service schools. US military planners further laid the groundwork for the development of certain capabilities useful against these theoretical threats. This gave the US military and its core of leaders and future leaders experience planning for a multitude of threats so when war came they were experienced in said strategic plans and inroads with industry to build the capabilities needed to face those threats when needed.

As discussed, the situation experienced by the United States in the interwar years is not universally applicable. As we have noted, the Israeli capabilities-based strategy suffered from an incomplete diagnosis, flawed guiding policy and coherent action, and ultimately proved unsuitable to the conflict at hand. Furthermore, the IDF did not adapt its strategy during the conflict. At first glance this would seem to be a solid repudiation of a capabilities-based strategy. Much like the successes of the two threat-based strategies, however, this unsuccessful strategy was situationally dependent. In fact, the failure of the Israeli capabilities-based strategy depended

54

primarily in one thing, Israeli overconfidence in their capabilities. Had the IDF perhaps spent

some effort in theoretical planning instead of solely relying on their capabilities as a deterrent,

they may have foreseen some gaps in their strategy.

The overreliance on capabilities led to other issues in the Israeli strategy, including the

initial incomplete diagnosis. Previous successful campaigns led the Israelis to place their trust in

their capabilities and feel comfortable forging a strategy that lacked a specified threat, problem,

or issue. It was the continued reliance on those capabilities and underestimation of Arab nations'

ability to adapt to and overcome them, if even for a short time, which led to the IDF's difficulties

in wartime. This is the lesson inherent in the Israeli case study: having good capabilities is not the

be-all end-all to having a good capabilities-based strategy. Other capabilities-based strategies

could quite possibly overcome a similar incomplete diagnosis by pairing capabilities with some

measure of theoretical forethought as in the case of the US interwar strategy. Strategists could

then adapt these capabilities to potential holes in the strategy and use it against emergent threats

with minimal growing pains.

The situational nature of all three case studies points to the emergent nature of strategy.

Events that occurred after strategists developed all of these strategies, whether threat-based or

capabilities-based, had an effect on the refinement and employment of those strategies. Stephen

Lauer posits that the formation of military strategy occurs at the intersection of doctrine and

policy aims. Since real world situations determine policy aims and the future cannot be divined in

advance, the corresponding implication is that all strategy is emergent.[167] While strategy certainly

has an emergent component, it also has a deliberate, or preplanned, component as Mintzberg

---

[167] Stephen Lauer, "The Tao of Doctrine: Contesting an Art of Operations" (Unpublished
Paper, 2016).

argues.[168] According to him, this deliberate element requires significant thought about the future even if strategists cannot predict it with total accuracy.[169]

Stephan Frühling calls this forethought defense planning and sees it as the key to managing strategic risk.[170] Frühling argues that whether strategists develop a strategy for a known adversary or a wide range of potential issues in a complex environment, they can never eliminate uncertainty about what will actually transpire. As such, defense planning is an apt tool to manage strategic risks stemming from uncertainty.[171] This planning includes everything from development of future equipment to training, theoretical war planning, and wargaming. Frühling further argues that while knowing your adversary ahead of time certainly makes strategic development less uncertain and risky, that is a rare case and the focus of all defense planning efforts should be to identify risks to your strategy.[172] It was in this area that the Prussians and US military succeeded and the IDF failed. While the first two focused efforts during strategic development on applying lessons from the past and thinking through conflicts or potential issues to come, the IDF inherently believed any future conflict would play out the same way previous ones did and thus failed to identify risks to their strategy.

This is the crux of what is evident in all three case studies. Whether threat-based or capabilities-based, a military strategy must identify risks or shortcomings in the strategy through

---

[168] Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, 25.

[169] Ibid., 1.

[170] Stephan Frühling, *Routledge Security in Asia Pacific Series*, vol. 27, *Defence Planning and Uncertainty: Preparing for the Next Asia-Pacific War* (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 1.

[171] Ibid., 2-3.

[172] Ibid., 202-204.

preplanning, if only theoretically, for war with potential adversaries. A threat-based strategy by its nature requires such forethought, but that does not preclude such thought from occurring as part of a capabilities-based strategy. Thus, if this is accomplished, nations can effectively employ either a type of strategy in a complex environment.

Bibliography

Aker, Frank. *October 1973: The Arab-Israeli War*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985.

Bird, W.D. *Strategy of the Franco-German War: 1870 up to the Battle of Sedan.* London: Hugh Rees LTD, 1909.

Bousquet, Antoine, and Simon Curtis. "Beyond Models and Metaphors: Complexity Theory, Systems Thinking and International Relations." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24, no. 1 (March 2011): 43-62.

Clausewitz, Carl von, ed., trans. *Carl von Clausewitz: Two Letters On Strategy.* Edited and translated by Peter Paret and Daniel Moran. Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1984.

Defence White Paper 2013. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013.

Dolman, Everett C. *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*. London: Frank Cass, 2005.

Freedman, Lawrence. *Strategy: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Frisbee, John. *Makers of the United States Air Force*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1996.

Frühling, Stephan. *Routledge Security in Asia Pacific Series*. Vol. 27, *Defence Planning and Uncertainty: Preparing for the Next Asia-Pacific War*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

Gaetke, Matthew. "Certainty Is Illusion: The Myth of Strategic Guidance." Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2015.

Gawrych, George. *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: The Albatross of Decisive Victory*. Leavenworth Papers 21. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1996.

Gole, Henry G. *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940.* Association of the US Army Book. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003.

Howard, Michael. *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Jervis, Robert. "Thinking Systemically About Geopolitics." *Geopolitics* 15 (2010): 165-71.

Kennedy, Paul M. *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War*. New York: Random House, 2013.

Lauer, Stephen. "The Tao of Doctrine: Contesting an Art of Operations." Unpublished Paper, 2016.

Liddell Hart, Basil Henry. *Strategy*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Meridian, 1991.

Matloff, Maurice. *The US Army in WWII: The War Department, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1959.

Mintzberg, Henry. *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners*. New York: Free Press, 1994.

Moltke, Helmuth von. *Extracts from Moltke's Correspondence Pertaining to the War 1870-1871*. Translated by Harry Bell. Fort Leavenworth, KS: The Army Schools Press, 1911.

Moltke, Helmuth von. *The Franco-German War of 1870-71*. London: Greenhill Books, 1992.

Monroe, Elizabeth, and A.H. Farrar-Hockley. *The Arab-Israel War: October 1973 Background and Events*. Adelphi Papers 111. London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975.

Murray, Williamson, and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds. *Successful Strategies: Triumphing in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Nicholson, Jeremy. "Escape the Friend Zone." *Psychology Today*. Accessed November 10, 2015. https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-attraction-doctor/201112/escape-the-friend-zone-friend-girlfriend-or-boyfriend.

Quadrennial Defense Review Report: September 30, 2001. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001.

Quadrennial Defense Review 2014. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014.

Ressa, Keith T. "US VS the World: America's Color Coded War Plans and the Evolution of Rainbow 5." Master's thesis. Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2010.

Rigby, David. *Allied Master Strategists: The Combined Chiefs of Staff in World War II*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012.

Ross, Steven T. *American War Plans 1919-1941*. Vol. 2, *Plans for War Against the British Empire and Japan: The Red, Orange, and Red-Orange Plans, 1923-1938*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992.

Ross, Steven T. *American War Plans 1919-1941*. Vol. 3, *Plans to Meet the Axis Threat, 1939-1940*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992.

Ross, Steven T. *American War Plans 1919-1941*. Vol. 5, *Plans for Global War: Rainbow-5 and the Victory Program, 1941*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992.

Rumelt, Richard P. *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters*. New York: Crown Business, 2011.

Safire, William. *Safire's Political Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Sandler, Stanley. *World War II in the Pacific: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 2001.

Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014.

Walt, Stephen. "One World, Many Theories." *Foreign Policy* 110 (Spring 1998): 29-46.

Watson, Mark. *The US Army in WWII: The War Department, Prewar Plans and Preparation*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1950.

Wawro, Geoffrey. *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Wilson, Isaiah. "Strategy, Revisited: Analyzing the Shift from a Threat-Based to Capabilities-Based Approach to US Strategic Planning." West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, 2002. Accessed November 19, 2015. http://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/6294/uploads.

Wurmser, David. "The Evolution of Israeli Grand Strategy: Strategy and Tactics and the Confluence with Democratic Philosophy." PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1990.